

Identity and Everyday Life: Essays in the Study of Folklore, Music and Popular Culture. By Harris M. Berger and Giovanna P. Del Negro. (Middletown (CT): Wesleyan University Press, 2004. Pp. xvii+185, table of contents, notes, works cited, index, ISBN 0-8195-6687-X, pbk.)

Sarah J. Moore

Volume 27, numéro 1, 2005

Appartenances
Belonging

URI : <https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/014037ar>

DOI : <https://doi.org/10.7202/014037ar>

[Aller au sommaire du numéro](#)

Éditeur(s)

Association Canadienne d'Ethnologie et de Folklore

ISSN

1481-5974 (imprimé)

1708-0401 (numérique)

[Découvrir la revue](#)

Citer ce compte rendu

Moore, S. J. (2005). Compte rendu de [*Identity and Everyday Life: Essays in the Study of Folklore, Music and Popular Culture.* By Harris M. Berger and Giovanna P. Del Negro. (Middletown (CT): Wesleyan University Press, 2004. Pp. xvii+185, table of contents, notes, works cited, index, ISBN 0-8195-6687-X, pbk.)]. *Ethnologies*, 27(1), 346–348. <https://doi.org/10.7202/014037ar>

perhaps distinguish between “death” (the concrete yet unfathomable state of being “not alive”), “dying” (the gerund for the act of transition from life to death), “the dying” (the noun for those whose death is imminent), and “the dead” (those whose death is a going concern). Perhaps it is perspectival. Consider Stalin’s “A single death is a tragedy; a million deaths is a statistic” and Mel Brooks’ “Tragedy is when I get a paper cut on my little finger. Comedy is when you fall in a manhole and die.” The word “paradox” has two meanings, which are actually opposites of each other: it is either a statement which is seemingly true but is in fact self-contradictory, or it is a statement which is seemingly self-contradictory but is in fact true. This book supplies ample arguments that, despite one’s initial expectations, humour and death, and the related pairing of joy and grief, are to be found together as often as they are kept separate.

Ian Brodie
Memorial University of Newfoundland
St. John’s, Newfoundland

Identity and Everyday Life: Essays in the Study of Folklore, Music and Popular Culture. By Harris M. Berger and Giovanna P. Del Negro. (Middletown (CT): Wesleyan University Press, 2004. Pp. xvii+185, table of contents, notes, works cited, index, ISBN 0-8195-6687-X, pbk.)

Berger and Del Negro’s collaborative work, *Identity and Everyday Life*, is a critical examination of the notions of self, reflexivity, and identity as presented in expressive culture, and is a valuable source for scholars interested in theoretical issues related to folklore, music, and cultural studies. However, for readers looking for an accessible study of identity presented through numerous examples and cultural foci, Berger and Del Negro’s book is unsuitable, mainly due to its complex written style and lack of case studies in a condensed form. Furthermore, the theoretical positioning of the essays in combination with the book’s extensive philosophical content is overly advanced for the reader interested in a panoply of folklore, popular culture and music. The title of the book indicates a broader spectrum of folklore, culture, and music than is actually discussed within its parameters. *Identity and Everyday Life* could have also included a greater examination of these general terms, and further examples of performance and culture would have

been appropriate. A more suitable title would not only include some inkling of the interconnected dynamics of reflexivity and self in expressive culture as theorized by the authors but would use words such as performance and identity to better indicate the tone of the book.

Identity and Everyday Life begins with the authors' investigation into expressive culture and is followed by Berger's chapter on "Theory as Practice" in folklore scholarship. The main example used to frame the presented arguments is an examination of heavy metal singer Timmy Owens in the third chapter of the compilation, Berger's "Horizons of Melody and the Problems of the Self." Del Negro's case study of the *passeggiata*, a ritual promenade observed in Italy, serves as an example in the fourth chapter, "The Role of Reflexivity in the Aesthetics of Performance: Verbal Art, Public Display, and Popular Music." A final chapter concludes the study with a reconsideration of the notion of identity and how the concept is best understood as an interpretive framework by individuals (both performers and audience members) who understand and attach meaning to their reading of a performance. Berger and Del Negro's aim to "provide scholars with a conceptual apparatus for making more sophisticated readings of performance" (xiv) is achieved through the insightful case studies in the compilation, and the concept of expressive culture as flexible and dialectic is reiterated in the various theories presented by the authors. In doing so, *Identity* is successful in both its intent and its discussion.

Expressive culture, one domain among the many that inform social structure, is created in a multiplicity of ways and is received and made meaningful by various ways of interpretation. As one of the means through which society conducts itself, expressive culture is omnipresent and created in "practices of production," therefore inherently linked with both audience and performance. Addressing himself to folklorists, Berger acknowledges the obviously complex task of gleaning general artistic behaviour from a society or culture because of its forever emerging nature, and advises a practice oriented approach that utilizes both theory and data to obtain insight on the expressive act. An explanation of Husserl's concept of *eidōs* (the experienced essence) forms the background for a discussion of the phenomenological concept of *eidōs*, which seeks to depict the experience of a particular domain of social life. What Berger suggests is that this experience is a rich dialectic: a gestalt of both *eidōs* and a set of particular factual details (25-32).

Pursuant with the concept of theory as practice in folklore scholarship, the author's ultimate conclusion is that "we must use theory to illuminate our data, and data to illuminate our theory" (39). The illuminating explanations of metatheory, *eidōs*, and phenomenology contribute greatly to the essay's discourse, although further practical examples would clarify the author's overall presentation.

Berger and Del Negro's examination of identity proceeds into a discussion of the notion of self, reflexivity, and identity in the latter part of the book, where the authors remind us that individuals must be self-aware (as both performers and observers) for interaction to occur. In order to produce meaning, one must read the metacommunication of the performance along with all other elements of their conduct in a given social context. The penultimate chapter is the highlight of the book, and functions as a pedagogical tool for those seeking ways in which to interpret performance and performative interaction.

Theories by Bermúdez, Husserl, and Kohák are used as major sources for the essays contained in *Identity* and it would be useful for readers to be familiar with them in order to fully appreciate Berger and Del Negro's interpretation. While the compilation presents theoretical discourse that is an important addition to the field of folklore, the dense philosophical discussion and complex style of writing are a detriment to what could be a clear examination of performance and theory. Ultimately, I would recommend *Identity and Everyday Life* for scholars seeking to theorize culture and performance in an advanced domain rather than for those seeking general discussion on folklore and identity.

Sarah J. Moore
Memorial University of Newfoundland
St. John's, Newfoundland

References

- Bermúdez, José Luis. 1998. *The Paradox of Self-Consciousness*. Cambridge (MA): MIT Press.
- Husserl, Edmund. [1931] 1960. *Cartesian Meditations: An Introduction to Phenomenology*. The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff.
- Kohák, Erasm V. 1978. *Idea and Experience: Edmund Husserl's Project of Phenomenology in "Ideas I."* Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
-